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Congress Acts to Censor Academics Who Criticize Government Policy

Assault on free speech, thought ignored by mainstream

By Michael Collins Piper

With little notice — except in Israel and in the pages of a handful of small but highly influential pro-Israel newspapers across the United States — the U.S. House of representatives passed "thought control" legislation that would set up a mechanism to punish American universities that permit on-campus academics and students to criticize Israel.

The bill establishes a seven-member federal advisory review board in the U.S. department of Education. Although its advocates formally deny it — but everyone knows better — the purpose of this board is to curtail academic dissent against U.S. foreign policy, particularly in the realm of American policy in the Middle East. The overall process sets the stage for the Department of Education to deny federal funding to colleges and universities which are determined to be harboring critics of Israel on their faculties.

While the measure does not directly permit the board to direct what any professor can or cannot say, the bottom line is that if a professor is determined to have a bias against Israel, the Department of Education has the authority to pull federal funding from the university where the professor teaches. In other words, this is a "backdoor" method of censorship, holding the threat of funding cuts over the heads of professors and their universities.

This police-state-style measure — enthusiastically endorsed by the pro-Israel lobby in Washington — was incorporated into a larger legislative package passed by the House on March 30 under the innocuous-sounding title "To Amend and Extend the Higher Education Act of 1965" (H.R. 609). The chief sponsor of the scheme was Rep. Patrick Tiberi (R-Ohio). The initiative is contained in section 601 of the massive bill under the heading "International And Foreign Language Studies."

Although this particular thought-control measure was, at one point, numbered H.R. 509 — when its dangerous intent was first reported by ***American Free Press*** — the bill underwent several numerical changes during the time it was being considered by the House. This added confusion to the matter and certainly hindered the efforts of those who were interested in blocking the legislation.

On the other hand, according to the April 12 issue of the Washington-based Jewish Week newspaper, "The American Jewish Congress, which led lobbying for the advisory board, blitzed Congress members in the days before its passage."

The House bill has now been referred to the Senate which has already approved legislation giving the secretary of education considerable authority to slash funding at universities charged with "anti-Semitism" — that is, having open on-campus criticism of Israel or expressing sympathy for the Christian and Muslim Palestinian people.

However, the Senate version of this authoritarian measure is marginally less dangerous than the House version, if only because the Senate version does not include the provision for the federal advisory board. The House and the Senate will now begin hammering out differences between the measures for final consideration.

The current House legislation is a disguised reincarnation of an even earlier pernicious proposal by two White-House-hungry Republican senators, Rick Santorum (Pa.) and Sam Brownback (Kan.), who were clearly pandering to the Israeli lobby (and pro-Israel campaign contributors) by promoting such measures.

After AFP learned of the scheme by Santorum and Brownback and focused on their intention of introducing so-called "ideological diversity" legislation designed to curtail criticism of Israel on American college campuses, the resulting negative publicity forced the duo to back off.

Angry that the scheme had been derailed, the New York-based ***Jewish Week*** published a story about the controversy generated by AFP's reportage saying AFP's revelation of the Santorum-Brownback scheme was "a dangerous urban legend, deliberate disinformation at worst" concocted by "several leading conspiracy theorists and Holocaust revisionists," which had become "an article of faith throughout the Arab world and in some U.S. left-wing circles."

In fact, the first and little-noticed report about the Santorum-Brownback scheme, (which later spawned the House measures) was first mentioned in the April 15, 2003, in the small-circulation ***New York Sun***, a stridently pro-Israel "neo-conservative" daily. The Sun revealed that the two senators and several of their colleagues had discussed such legislation in the company of representatives of a number of powerful pro-Israel organization at a private meeting on Capitol Hill.

In any event, the Santorum-Brownback proposal has — like the proverbial "bad penny" — popped up again, in new guise, and is now before Congress.

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